

THE SOPHISTS

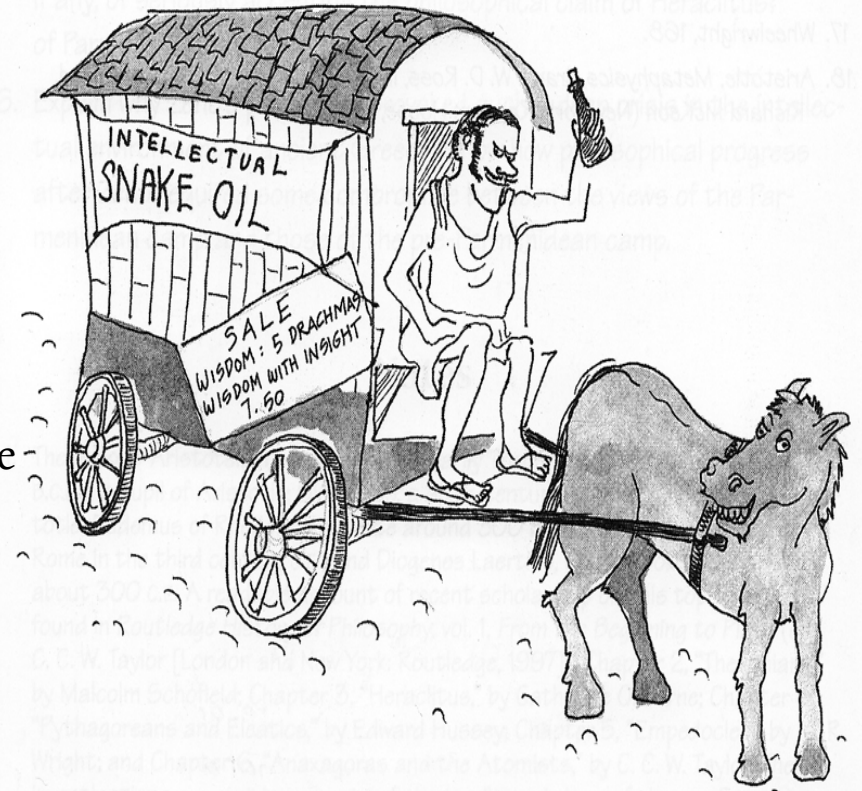
Some Prolegomena...

Who were they and what were they up to?

- » A movement/group? A few individual, like-minded thinkers?
- » Wise men or intellectual charlatans? Itinerant teachers for hire... kind of like modern day lawyers that are just “out to make a buck”.

Why were they so (in)famous?

- » They were responsible for teaching many of the young men of Athens
- » They challenged (and often undermined) traditional Athenian values and sources of authority
- » They had no “real stake” in the things they were teaching... they were not really engaged in a search for the truth...



The Sophists

THE SOPHISTS

A Few Guiding Themes...

Skepticism

- » Can anything be known for certain? The conclusions of Pre-Socratic philosophical inquiry seem a bit varied and uncertain (*aporetic*).

Relativism

- » There is no absolute truth, value, etc. Whether something is true or false, good or bad depends on the person or group who holds that truth or value.

Personal success by means of persuasive speech

- » Personal success (primarily in the political arena) is the primary goal for Athenian citizens
- » The art of verbal persuasion (rhetoric) is the primary route/means to achieving personal success
- » The ability to “make the weaker argument seem the stronger” is a skill that can be taught

